

ANCIENT INDIA AND THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD *

The problem of the relations between India and the Graeco-Roman world is of great interest as a subject for research both for the study of Graeco-Roman culture and for research into the history and culture of ancient India. Despite the geographical remoteness and the differences of the historical destinies between the regions in question, there have existed between them throughout millenniums close (and at some periods even direct) links in different fields of culture, politics and trade.

The beginnings of India's contacts with the Mediterranean area date back to a very early epoch, and from the 6th century B. C. they are already to be found registered in Greek sources. Since the contacts continued throughout the whole of the Graeco-Roman history (a circumstance reflected, *inter alia*, in the works of early Christian authors), it is possible both to identify the general nature and the directedness of the links, and to see their dynamics from epoch to epoch. As to the classical tradition with regard to India, it did not remain unchanged either. Each epoch, involving important changes in the political situation, in the directedness of the trade connections, as well as broadening of the geographical horizons and important processes in the Graeco-Roman culture, has been marked with evolving notions about India. A study of this

* Paper read at the V International Sanskrit Conference (Varanasi, October, 1981).

process makes it possible to clarify the nature of information about India at each specific historical stage or to understand why at different times classical authors were interested in different aspects of Indian history and culture.

The problem at hand is of exceptional importance for Indology not only because it may be possible to clarify the attitude to India on the part of the representatives of a different culture, but above all because many of the ancient references to that country, as has now been established, relied on the evidence of visitors to India, and even on some first-hand knowledge of the Indian tradition. In some cases, the Graeco-Roman texts (meaning, above all, the *Indika* by Megasthenes) are the only dated sources on the history and culture of ancient India. As we know, no Indian dated written sources prior to the epoch of Aśoka have been preserved. The evidence provided by Megasthenes is important both because it comprises the notes of a man who had for some years resided in the court of Candragupta, and also because the accuracy of his descriptions is reliably confirmed by local Indian tradition. Besides, there is a body of direct evidence indicating that Megasthenes borrowed ancient Indian terms for his descriptions. A later period is characterized by a growing number of facts indicating growing knowledge of the Ancient Indian tradition. All this testifies to the need for a more detailed study of classical sources on India, the *sine qua non* condition in the process being their critical comparison with particular Indian texts to check the accuracy and reliability of the information.

Within the topic of India and the Graeco-Roman world now under consideration, two important problems are *a)* to identify the nature and the directedness of the cultural, economic, political and diplomatic ties of India, with the Graeco-Roman world and *b)* to establish the relation of the Indian tradition to the Graeco-Roman culture. In the process, it should be borne in mind that the history of the inter-relationships between the two great ancient civilizations - the Indian and the Graeco-Roman - is a highly complex set of contacts, the meeting of different ethno-cultural zones of two different social organisms and religious-philosophical traditions.

By the end of the eighteenth and especially at the beginning and the middle of the nineteenth centuries, when the Western world seemed to have re-discovered for itself the Ancient Indian culture, there existed a tendency to estimate it with yardsticks taken from European civilisation. Since the concept of Eurocentrism was dominant in those days, the Western scholars were not infrequently apt to consider the achievements of Ancient India from positions of western civilisation. At that time, the number of Indian sources published was not great, while the classical (Graeco-Roman) references to India were accepted uncritically and were, as a rule, found reliable. Even such a prominent Indologist as Christian Lassen, despite having done much to acquaint the European reader with Ancient Indian sources, naively trusted practically all the Graeco-Roman references to India¹. Publication of translations of classical authors on India, done by McCrindle towards the close of last century, of course played a big role in acquainting Indologists with the wealth of the material on the Graeco-Roman tradition². But no textological analysis or attribution of individual fragments (ascribed by a later tradition to Megasthenes), had been made, however; actually, many of the descriptions of India, ascribed to that author, are, as has now been established, not his. Regrettably, to many Indologists McCrindle's authority has remained indisputable up till now, a circumstance attested by even many of the new works on the history and culture of Ancient India, especially those on the Maurya epoch, whose descriptions are based on classical sources unjustifiably attributed to Megasthenes.

It is true that the last decades have seen - in connection with the renewed interest in the ties between India and the Graeco-Roman world - the emergence of a new approach to the study of the classical literature on India, those sources were now subjected to critical analysis, and besides, the scope of the sources used, became broader through addition of new, previously almost unknown, sources. An important contribution to the study of this

1. CHR. LASSEN, *Indische Alterthumskunde*. Vol. I-IV, Lpz., 1847-1861. See, for example, Vol. II. p. 662-663.

2. P. W. MCCRINDLE, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Calcutta-Bombay-London, 1877 etc.

subject - area was made by B. Timmer, J. Filliozat, J. D.M. Derrett, T. S. Brown, F. F. Schwarz, A. Dihle, P. H. L. Eggermont, A. Dahlquist and others³ - Indian scholars, too, are making increasingly broader use of classical sources, and trying to find analogies for them in the Indian tradition. Besides the well-known publications by R. C. Majumdar and Ramchandra Jain⁴, one can also mention the works in recent years by Samoresh Bandyopadhyaya, R. A. Jairazbhoy, B. N. Puri, N. Chapekar, G. N. Banerjee⁵. One would assume, however, that the time has already come for a new, scientific and critical translation of the fragments of classical sources on India, accompanied by a detailed Indological commentary.

To provide a reliable evaluation of the authenticity of the classical references to India, it is necessary, above all, to clarify how and why the image of India changed in the Graeco-Roman tradition.

It is possible to identify some of the periods in the perception of India by the Graeco-Roman tradition.

The 1st period - one before Alexander's campaign (the 6th century B. C. - the twenties of the 4th century B. C.), the time of nebulous, accidental and unconnected notions basically about that part of India which was included in the Achaemenid empire (Heca-

3. B. TIMMER, *Megasthenes en de indische Maatschapij*, Amsterdam, 1930; J. FILLIOZAT, *Les relations exterieures de l'Inde*, Pondichery, 1956; A. DAHLQUIST, *Megasthenes and Indian Religion*, Uppsala, 1962; J. D. M. DERRETT, *The History of « Palladius on the Races of India and Brahmins », « Classica et Mediaevalia », 21 (1960), pp. 64-135; ID., Two Notes on Megasthenes' Indica, in JAOS, 88 (1968), pp. 776-781; T. S. BROWN, *The Reliability of Megasthenes*, in « American Journal of Philology », 76 (1955), pp. 18-33; F. F. SCHWARZ, *Arrian's Indike on India: Intention and Reality*, in « East and West », 25 (1975), pp. 191-198; A. DIHLE, *Indische Philosophen bei Clemens Alexandrinus*. Mullus (Festschrift Th. Klauser). Münster, 1964; P. H. L. EGGERMONT, *Alexander's Campaigns in Sind and Baluchistan and the Siege of the Brahmin Town of Harmatelia*, Leuven, 1975; I. W. SEDLAR, *India and the Greek World. A study in the Transmission of Culture*, New Jersey, 1980.*

4. R. C. MAJUMDAR, *Classical Accounts of India*, Calcutta, 1961; R. Jain, ed., *McCrimdell's Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, New Delhi, 1972.

5. See: R. A. JAIRAZBHOY, *Foreign Influence in Ancient India*, Bombay, 1963; B. N. PURI, *India in Classical Greek Writings*, Ahmedabad, 1963; N. CHAPEKAR, *Ancient India and Greece. A Study of Their Cultural Contacts*, Delhi, 1977; G. N. BANERJEE, *Hellenism in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1977.

teus, Herodotus, Ktesias). It is a period in which one traces the inception of the two main topics of the classical tradition regarding India, namely: *a*) that India as a land of treasures and wonders; and *b*) the theme of the « Indian Sages » (Sophistai).

The IInd period - one of Alexander's campaign, the time of a direct interaction of cultures, which marked the start of a largely authentic historical tradition about India (Onesicritus, Nearchus, Aristobulus, Ptolemy and other participants of the campaign). These works, as is known, were preserved only as fragments in the works of later authors (Strabo, Diodorus, Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Plutarch and others), who used mainly those excerpts from the notes of Alexander's officers, which had to do with the description of the military operations of the Graeco-Macedonian army and of the story about Alexander's dispute with the Indian sages.

In the Indological literature, the testimony of the participants of Alexander's campaign are usually regarded as reflecting a single stratum of the classical tradition⁶. This approach, however, needs certain adjustments. The fact is that participating in Alexander's campaign and observing Indian reality, they perceived it differently, registering different aspects of Indian life and putting their own interpretation on what they saw and heard. And this is not fortuitous. While Onesicritus was a philosopher and disciple of Diogenes of Sinope, the founder of the Cynic school who according to the tradition enjoyed the deep respect of Alexander⁷, Aristobulus, for his part, was a man of practical mind. He was above all interested in the natural conditions, specific ancient monuments, and strove to reflect as accurately as he could what he saw. Nearchus, Alexander's helmsman and the Commander of his fleet, wrote an official account of the campaign and, besides, kept diaries known to Strabo and Arrian. Nearchus was not under the influence of any philosophical schools of thought, and so could provide an unbiased description of the customs and beliefs of the Indians. It is therefore

6. See, for example: A. L. BASHAM, *Wonder that was India*, 1969; *Age of the Nandas and Mauryas*, Benares, 1952.

7. L. PEARSON, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great*, New York, Oxf., 1960. T. S. BROWN, *Onesicritus. A Study in Hellenistic Historiography*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949; R. MERKELBACH, *Die Quellen der griechischen Alexanderromane*, München, 1954.

not surprising that these differences in the backgrounds and interests should have resulted in their being concerned with different aspects of the then Indian life. Even when they described the same things, their perceptions and descriptions turned out to be different.

It is clear that the tradition about Alexander's dispute with Indian sages comes from Onescritus the philosopher. Being a zealous proponent of Cynic ideas, however, Onescritus endowed the description of that dispute with a purely Cynic character. One can, of course, trace some undoubtedly Indian features in his report, but they are almost totally lost in the overally Cynic interpretation. It is, however, precisely this aspect of Onesicritus description that was accepted and amplified by the subsequent tradition, while many modern scholars, heedless of this circumstance, continue to regard this information as a source for reconstructing the religious and philosophical ideas of Ancient India in that epoch. The bias shown by Onesicritus was probably responsible for his not paying any special attention to such a specifically Indian phenomenon as the *brāhmaṇas*, which - on the contrary - did not leave uninterested his companions-in-arms Nearchus and Aristobulus who were not philosophers. Nearchus, for instance, both provided a description of the *brāhmaṇas* and noted such an important detail as the difference between *brāhmaṇas* - as advisers to the king and *brāhmaṇas* ascetics (Strabo, XV, I, 66).

The IIIrd period, in the perception of India's image in the classical literature, can roughly be termed as « the period of embassies » (the end of the 4th and the start of the 3rd centuries B. C.). It is linked with the names of Megasthenes, ambassador of Seleucus the 1st to Candragupta Maurya, and of Deimachus, ambassador of Antiochus the 1st to Bindusāra. While numerous fragments have remained, as we have said, from the work of Megasthenes, practically nothing has reached us from the « India » by Deimachus. It is characteristic, however, that he wrote Περὶ εὐσεβείας (« On Piety ») devoted, judging by the title, to the beliefs of the Indians. This assumption is supported by the fact that in

the Greek versions of Aśoka's edicts the term εὐσέβεια is equivalent to the Prakrit *dhamma* (*dharma*)⁸.

In the Graeco-Roman tradition, Megasthenes work enjoyed wide popularity, with many Greek and Roman authors using it as the basis for their descriptions of India. As ambassador, Megasthenes stayed for several years in Pāṭaliputra to get first-hand knowledge of the state structure of the Maurya empire, its social relations and its religious and philosophical trends. While Alexander's companions-in-arms visited only the North-Western India, Megasthenes stayed in the Ganges valley, the most developed part of the country. In his *Indika*, Megasthenes included not only his personal observations and informations gathered from local people, but also relied broadly on the works by Alexander's companions-in-arms, checking and complementing them. It is natural that the fragments from Megasthenes' *Indika* that have reached our day have differing values for Indologists, since besides fantastic stories they contain a fair amount of absolutely accurate evidence whose reliability is confirmed by ancient Indian texts and, in addition, by the Aśoka inscriptions almost coinciding in time with Megasthenes' stories. It is difficult to say with certainty whether not Megasthenes, knew local languages and could learn independently from the local tradition, but some of his references render very accurately the meaning and the spirit of Indian sources. There are grounds to assume that, obtaining local sources, he not only rendered their general meaning, but also attempted to provide semantic and lexical analogies to some of the Indian terms. Being an ambassador, he strove with professional precision to describe the stage structure (the functions of the king and officials, the central and provincial administration), the organization of the army and the social structure. It is quite possible that he selected all that information for an official account, the more so that India played an important role in the policy of the Seleucids.

In the Indological literature, Megasthenes' fragments are utilized on a broad scale, but unfortunately no attempts is being made

8. F. F. SCHWARZ, *Mauryas und Seleukiden. Gedankenschrift für W. Brandenstein* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft. 14), Innsbruck, 1968, S. 228.

to find for them some correspondence in Indian sources dating back to different periods. These are, above all, the *Arthaśāstra*, *dharmaśāstras*, epic stories, although in our view the most reliable way lies through comparison, including terminology, with Aśokan inscriptions and direct references, even in later sources, to the empire of the Mauryas.

In order to have a clearer picture of the exceptional value of Megasthenes' fragments, and to attract once again the attention of Indologists to the need for their comparative analysis with the data of the Indian sources, let me refer to his description of the « seventh group » in Indian society (Strabo, XV, 1, 49). Megasthenes' text identifies two groups of officials *σύμβουλοι* and *συνέδροι τοῦ βασιλέως*. McCrindle translated this as « councillors and assessors of the king »⁹, and in the relatively new translation by H. L. Jones we find « advisers and councillors of the king »¹⁰. Both translations render only the general sense, although in this case Megasthenes was exceptionally accurate in registering the existence of the really existing institutions - *rāja-sabhā* and *pariṣad*¹¹. It is not fortuitous that Megasthenes identifies two categories of officials, with the second characterized « those meeting in session (sitting) with the king » which accurately corresponds to *mantri-pariṣad* about whose *pariṣad* existence we learn from the Aśoka edicts. By its composition, *mantri-pariṣad* was much more limited than *sabhā*, and was the main deliberative organ under the kind. It is characteristic that the Greek *συνέδροι* (« the sitting with ») accurately corresponds to the Sanscrit *pariṣad* (to sit around). In this case, Megasthenes not only correctly described the existence of the two highest groups of state officials and identified their difference, but also attempted to render in Greek the lexical structure of the Indian term. One could get the impression that this report reflects not only personal observation of the ambassador, but also indicates

9. R. Jain, ed., *McCrindle's Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, P. 85.

10. R. C. MAJUMDAR, *The Classical Accounts*, p. 268.

11. G. M. BONGARD-LEVIN, *India in the Mauryan Age*, Moscow, 1973, p. 189 (in Russian); *Id.*, *Megasthenes « Indika » and Inscriptions of Aśoka*, Moscow, 1960. See also G. M. BONGARD-LEVIN, *Mauryan India*, New Delhi, 1985.

his desire for a precise rendering of Indian terminology. Later writers borrowing from Megasthenes failed to see his profound meaning, but by continuing to quote him they unwittingly enriched Graeco-Roman tradition with accurate data.

Almost in all the Indological works as well as in specialized studies on the social structure of Ancient India to describe slavery, references is made to a fragment from Megasthenes, *Indika* preserved by Arrian (X, 9), which in the English translation by McCrindle reads: «All the Indians are free and not one of them is a slave»¹². On this basis, researchers not infrequently allege either an error on the part of Megasthenes, or stress that in the Maurya period India had no slave labour. If, however, one approaches Megasthenes' report from the Indological point of view then his message is different - let us in this connection recall Kauṭilya's words that «there shall not be slavery» (*dāsabhāva*) for Aryans, i.e. slavery for life (*na tvevāryasya dāsabhāvaḥ*). Megasthenes was absolutely accurate in getting at the meaning of then tradition, and by Indians (Indoi) he meant not all the inhabitants of India but rather only those free Aryans with full rights¹³.

The quantity of such examples could be increased, but our aim is different: it is not to shield Megasthenes from charges of bad faith, but to demonstrate the need for a new approach to his testimony, which is possible only on the basis of a creative collaboration between Sanscritologists and students of Graeco-Roman culture.

The study of Megasthenes' evidence is also important because the ancient literary tradition on India for the next several centuries relied almost totally on his work. This circumstance still awaits its final explanation: since the fact is that the Hellenic and early-Roman periods were marked by intensified trade and diplomatic contacts between India and the Roman world, and besides there was at work a contact and sometimes a synthesis of the cultural traditions of the two regions — Bactria, Indo-Greek kingdoms. In the Kushāṇa epoch, numerous embassies are sent to Rome. Roman

12. R. JAIN, ed., *McCrindle's Ancient India ...*

13. G. M. BONGARD-LEVIN, A. A. VIGASIN, *Society and State in Ancient India*, in «The Indian Historical Review», Vol. 5 (1978-1979), N. 1-2, p. 23.

trading factories appear in India, while in Alexandria in the first centuries A. D. visits by Indian merchants were an ordinary thing. Maritime trade becomes regular, which is attested to by « The Periplus of the Erythraean sea ».

It may well seem paradoxical that despite the appearance of new data on India, the literary classical tradition continues to be based on the works of the companions-in-arms of Alexander and Megasthenes, which became a sort of « canon » for describing the image of India. Even Strabo (1st century B. C. - 1st century A. D.), who has access to rather detailed data about India pertaining to his epoch, resorted to them extremely rarely, mainly for the description of natural phenomena. In describing society and culture, however, he relied exclusively on the old tradition, and ignored new data. To the ancient writer, India continued to be associated above all with Alexander's campaign. There was no extra depth to, or special interest in, Indian religion and philosophy, while the new geographical descriptions of India were mainly designed for merchants and sea-farers, and were of a purely practical nature.

In any use of the classical sources about India, it is necessary to take account of the above specificity of the ancient tradition about India.

The IVth period, at the time of the crisis of the Roman culture (beginning roughly from the 2nd century A. D.), is already characterized by different features and by the existence of two main trends in the description of India:

a) the « pagan » one, using old data about India, although some (above all the Neo-Platonics) begin to take a special interest in « Indian wisdom »;

b) the early-Christian, characterized by a profound understanding of Indian religion and philosophy (that of *brāhmaṇas*, *Brahmanism*) and by special attention to Buddhism.

The crisis of the pagan Graeco-Roman culture was accompanied by the search for new ideals: with special attention and in depth, writers and philosophers embarked on the study of the spiritual life of the countries of the East, including India; they conceived a desire to know the doctrines of Indian sages. Already

toward the end of the 1st century A. D. the orator Dio Crysostomus reflected the new tendencies in the spiritual climate of the Roman epoch, characterized by a wave of pessimism, a desire to break away from the maelstrom of life, and disenchantment with the values of the contemporary civilization. In his speeches, reproaching his countrymen, he did his best to eulogize the tradition that the Indian people were the happiest people on Earth (Orat. 35, 18). In his words, the *brāhmaṇas* are full of justice and love of the divine (Orat. 49, 7), they possess « the source of truth » (Orat. 35, 22).

At about the same time, the tradition places the work of Apollonius of Tyana, a famous sage and traveller and follower of Pythagoras¹⁴. Judging by his biography, written at the beginning of the 3rd century A. D. by Philostratus on orders from the Empress Julia Domna, Apollonius visited India, was in Taxila and met Indian *brāhmaṇas*. Philostratus said he used diaries kept by Damis, Apollonius travel companion, but the laudatory description no doubt also relied on the numerous legends that sprang up around the name of Apollonius. The latter was most interested in the lives and doctrines of Indian *brāhmaṇas*, which reflected the specificity of the tradition about India during the crisis of the Graeco-Roman culture. In the words of Philostratus, Apollonius was so much delighted by the wisdom of the *brāhmaṇas* that he even wished to preach their doctrine to Egyptians, Ethiopians, Greeks and Romans.

What features from the life and the doctrine of the *brāhmaṇas* attracted the attention of Philostratus? These were, above all, the ascetic way of life, ritual purity, nobility of origin, the prohibition of killing living beings, the belief in reincarnation and the teaching about five original elements of the world - water, air, earth, fire and ether. Many of Philostratus' provisions find analogies in Indian sources, but on the whole the panorama he created is too general and is biased, and does not reflect the complexity of the religious and philosophical life of India of that time. He did not see, and probably he did not want to see any other teachings, except Brahmanism. And this is no coincidence since it was precisely such an

14. J. CHARPENTIER, *The Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyana*, Uppsala-Leipzig, 1934.

image of India that was held dear by the late « pagan » authors. It was India that the late-Roman philosophers turned their eyes to disenchanted with the local philosophical systems and with trying to find a way out of the narrow framework of rationalism. That epoch saw a wide spread of mysticism, the idea of « merging with the universal soul », the concept of the supreme being incomprehensible to human reason, the being emerging as the ruler of the world, which has analogies in the Brahmanism of the *Upaniṣads*. Especially attractive to the « pagan » authors was the image of the brahmanic sage in his two « dimensions »: *a*) that of an ascetic, leading an extremely ascetic way of life; *b*) a highly educated and influential councillor to the ruler, a representative of the group that played a leading role in managing affairs of state.

These features, but with certain modifications, manifested themselves especially clearly in the doctrine of the Neo-Platonics. According to tradition, the founder of the school of thought Plotinus wished to be personally acquainted with the Indian *brāhmaṇas* and to understand the essence of their doctrine. He set out for the East with the troops of Emperor Gordian, but the murder of the Emperor frustrated the philosopher's plans (Porphyry. *Vita Plotini*, 3). An even more profound interest in Indian philosophy was taken by Plato's followers - Neo-Platonics. One of them, Porphyry, wrote an essay « On Abstinence from Animal Food ». He expounds in great detail many features of both the orthodox and non-orthodox religious-philosophical doctrines of India, mentioning important particulars.

A different aspect of « Indian wisdom » was reflected in the works of early-Christian authors. While the Neo-Platonics only made the first step aside from the traditional notion of Graeco-Roman tradition about India, the early-Christian writers, in virtue of their religious views, began to evaluate the Indian sages (above all the *brāhmaṇas*) in a deeper sense, and to approach the religious and philosophical teachings of the Indians from different positions.

During the first centuries of our era, Syria became the center for disseminating knowledge about India to the Graeco-Roman world. It is known that the much-travelled caravan routes which Indian embassies headed for Rome passed through Syria. Bardesan

(154-222), Christian preacher and the founder of Syrian - language literature, hailing from Edessa, found a totally new source of information about India, writing down stories brought by Indian ambassadors heading for the Roman empire. In the fragments of his work on India which have reached us, one can see two strata of information. One of them has to do with the description of the *brāhmaṇas* customs, including ordalia in the brahmanic cave temples, and the second - with a comparative description of the way of life and views of *brāhmaṇas* and *śramāṇas*. Although the division into *brāhmaṇas* and *śramāṇas* was known much earlier in classical literature, the information provided by Bardesan is notable for being more complete and profound. Unlike the tradition dating back to Megasthenes, Bardesan concentrated on the religious and philosophical teachings of Indians. He examined in especially great detail the views of Indian sages on the existence of the soul after the demise of the body, which had to do with Christian author's interest in this « problematique » and with their struggle against paganism. Bardesan correctly pointed out that if *brāhmaṇas* were representatives of the same population group (γένος), then *śramāṇas* saw their ranks swell through the influx of all those wishing to join, and united the representatives of all social groups of the population and ethnic groups. Bardesan's data on the king's support for non-orthodox teachings probably reflected the real situation in the Kushāṇa empire.

The brahmanical doctrine was expounded most fully in the work of another Christian author, Hippolytus of Rome. As was brilliantly demonstrated by the eminent French Indologist Jean Filliozat, his writings reflected closely or even exactly some ideas of the *Upaniṣads* ¹⁵.

Another hallmark of the early Christian tradition about India are direct references to Buddhism, although many scholars were even inclined to see Buddhists already among the *śramāṇas* of Megasthenes. The earliest surviving mention of Buddha in classical literature, was that of Clemens of Alexandria (*Strom.* I, 15, 71). In his work *Stromata* (200-202), Clemens strove to prove superiority

15. J. FILLIOZAT, *Les relations exterieures de l'Inde*.

of Christian religion over Greek philosophy, and to discredit the latter he said that Hellenic wisdom was not original, that long before it there had existed in Eastern countries philosophical systems not inferior to the Greek one. And at the same time, his assessment of the traditional brahmanic wisdom manifested a new, critical approach (for instance, *Strom.* IV, 4, 17), which sharply differed from the position of the pagan authors who unreservedly approved of *brāhmaṇas* and admired their way of life. Clemens contemporary, the famous Christian preacher Tertullianus (circa 160 - after 220) thought it proper to divorce himself from both the *brāhmaṇas* and the hymnosophists: « But we (the Christians, noted by this writer) are not *brāhmaṇas* and not in Indian hymnosophists who live in forests and keep aloof from life » (*Apologeticus*, 42).

Clemens, however, took a different attitude to Buddhism, and it was precisely because « they (Buddhists) regard him (the Buddha) as the God for his supreme divinity » (*Strom.* I, 15, 72). Clemens' references are important for Indology also because he used at least three different sources of information. One of them the traditional one, going back to Megasthenes, the second - as has been convincingly demonstrated by A. Dihle¹⁶, was linked with the Kushāṇa empire, while the third owed much to Clemens' teacher Pantaenus, who, according to tradition, for a long time during the end of the 2nd century preached Christianity in India. The information of Clemens of Alexandria on Buddhism was used by later Christian authors - Eusebius of Caesaria and Cyrillus of Alexandria.

Besides Clemens, information about Buddhism penetrated the Roman empire through Mesopotamia and Syria. Basically, Christian authors mentioned the Buddha while polimicizing with the Manichaeans (as, for instance, Victorianus), or in connection with the identity of legends of the births of the founders of Christianity and Buddhism (Hieronymus and others). With the exception of cases of Buddhism being linked with Manichaeism, the Christian writers described the doctrine of the Buddhists sympathetically, probably

16. A. DIHLE, *The Conception of India in Hellenistic and Roman Literature*, in « Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society », Vol. 10 (1964), p. 22.

because they wanted to contrapose it to paganism, regarding Buddhism as an approximation to the absolute truth of Christianity.

It seems to me probably that in periods of ideological crisis, the « pagan » thinkers turned their eyes - and it was not strange that they did - to Brahmanism with its many gods and the idea of the universal soul, while Christians in their struggle with the pagans found support in Buddhism - the traditional opponent of orthodox Brahmanism, - in Buddhism in which the Universal Buddha emerged as the analogue of the Christ. This suggestion also explains well the general interest on the part of the Christian authors precisely in Buddhism of the first centuries A. D., when in the Mahāyāna there emerged the cult of the Buddha as the supreme Being, and makes it possible to understand why the Graeco-Roman tradition was silent on Buddhism in earlier periods.

That was how the image of India took shape in the Graeco-Roman tradition. As we have tried to show, at each specific stage India was taken differently. To be more precise, each successive period moved to the forefront a particular aspect of the Indian spiritual life. These were, however, some general features which characterized the perception of the Indian culture by the Graeco-Roman world. This was conditioned by the specificity of the Graeco-Roman culture, by the attitude to other cultural values and by the whole system of ideological perceptions. The outlook of Graeco-Roman world was characterized by a live interest in alien cultures, and this, incidentally, was not due to practical considerations having to do only with politics and trade. With miraculous facility and ease, the Graeco-Roman world borrowed and adjusted customs, perceptions and ideas of peoples with whom it came into contact. Frequently, the Greek gods were identified with Eastern, including Indian, gods. Numerous legends have been preserved about the travels of Greek gods and heroes in countries of the East, for instance, about the « campaigns » of Dionysus and Heracles to India. The trend toward idealizing the wisdom of the East in the Graeco-Roman world easily reconciled itself with the desire for territorial aggrandizement, the wish to bring the peoples of the East under Greek and Roman influence.

Compared with the wealth of references to India in the Graeco-Roman literature, the Indian tradition has kept very little data about Greeks and Romans. Ancient Indian texts have not preserved a single clear mention about Alexander or his campaign. Such an omission is due only to the specificity of the orthodox brahmanical tradition, but it in no way testifies to an absence of contacts with the Graeco-Roman world or lack of interest in the Graeco-Roman culture in India. The orthodox tradition did not reflect a real process of cultural interaction which displayed itself in different fields - and above all in science and the arts. Many references to *yavana* can be found in inscriptions in texts on painting, in grammatical works (Pāṇini, Patañjali), in plays by Bhāsa and Kālidāsa, in the Pāli canon, etc. Profound interest in Greek science can be seen in the translation of a Greek astrological treatise into Sanskrit (*Yavana-Jātaka*). Cases have been known of lexical borrowings by Sanskrit from Greek and vice versa. The most numerous examples of the mutual enrichment of cultures have been handed down to us by the period of the Mauryas (edicts of Aśoka, some of them in Greek) as well as by the Kushāṇa epoch. A vivid example of the Graeco-Indian contacts is *Milindapañha*, which contains a talk between the Greek ruler Menander with a Buddhist sage Nagasena. The Greek ruler is described as a brilliant polemicist, a man of exceptional gifts; in the dispute, however, it is Nagasena who has the upper hand, while Menander becomes a loyal follower of the Buddha; and this hardly comes as a surprise considering the overall apologetic nature of the text. There are, however, numerous epigraphic testimonials of the first centuries A. D. to the effect that many Greeks descendants of colonists living in India espoused Buddhism and followed Indian customs.

Despite the fact that in Indian tradition references to social relations among Greeks are extremely few, those references are very accurate. One can point to the well-known testimony in the *Majjhima-Nikāya* (II, 148-149) to the division into slaves and free-men among the Yonas (Sanskrit *Yavanas*) and the absence among them of division into *varṇas*. The 13th rock edict of Aśoka specifically noted that the group of *brāhmaṇas* does not exist among the Yonas, i.e. they have no special class of priesthood.

The rapprochement of the two cultures was assisted in no small degree by trade ties which became especially intense in the first centuries A.D., a fact attested out by archeological findings both in India and in the Eastern Mediterranean. A vast scientific literature exists on this subject¹⁷.

The issues treated in the present paper cover only a small part of the entire subject which is the study of the interaction between the Graeco-Roman world and India. But they also clearly indicate how important and topical for Indology is the study of these problems which call for the united efforts of Sanskritologists and specialists in ancient history of the West.

17. M. M. KHVOSTOV, *History of the Eastern Trade of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (332 B.C. - A.D. 284), Kazan, 1907 (in Russian); E. H. WARMINGTON, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, Camb., 1928; H. G. RAWLINSON, *Intercourse between India and the Western World*, Camb., 1926 (2nd ed.); J. THORLEY, *The Development of Trade between the Roman Empire and the East under Augustus*, in «Greece and Rome», Vol. 16 (1969), p. 209-223.